

minds in motion

The Docent Educator

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Specialized Teaching



Specialized teaching features a singular collection, takes a particular educational approach, or serves a defined audience.

This issue examines specialized teaching resources, techniques, and situations applicable to many educators working in a wide variety of settings.

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▲ Fun with Bones ▲ Teaching and Space Technology ▲

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Cover: Suzy Marold, Special Tour Docent for the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center, engages this young visitor with specialized teaching techniques and personalized attention that address his specific needs.

The Persistence of Bias:

What's something everyone wants, few believe they get, and all must give to appreciate the cultural heritage of others? The answer is ... "respect."

Fundamental to everyone's psyche is bias, or their predisposed point of view. Bias is the consequence of individual, temporal, and cultural variables. It is a powerful force that colors how we consciously, and subconsciously, view the world and everything in it.

Attitudes, behaviors, beliefs, and practices are molded and shaped by learned value judgments and cultural presuppositions. They become ingrained and are not easily suspended. This is why, when we confront differences that impugn our entrenched notions and beliefs, the judgments and determinations that established our ethos come to mind.

Docents who teach about the customs, rituals, and artifacts of unfamiliar cultures undertake a formidable challenge. The persistence of their learners' biases can create obstacles that inhibit access to understanding and appreciation.

Simple methods that help visitors drop their barriers and suspend judgments are few. Teaching visitors openness and tolerance within the time constraints of docent-guided tours may be close to impossible and surely exceeds any realistic objective set for most touring programs. Nonetheless, establishing an appropriate tone and providing visitors with accessible ways to approach new or different

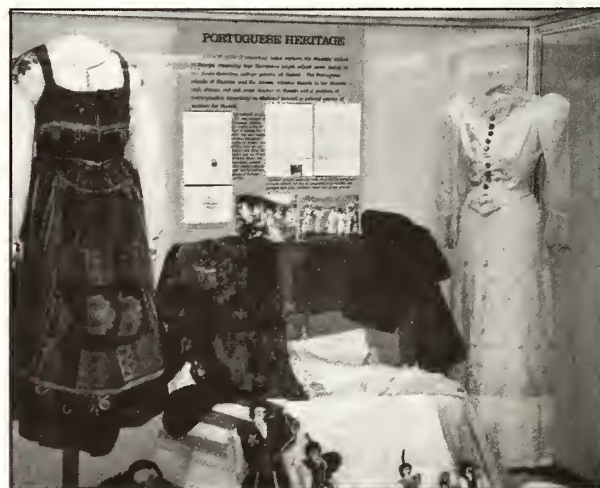
ideas and devisings can assist docents to succeed in this highly specialized field of teaching.

Hawaii, which is a very diverse society, does not have a clear majority population or completely dominate culture. I asked Dr. Leon Bruno, director of the Lyman Museum and Mission House in Hilo, HI, how docents there manage to teach about (and to) these many, sometimes competing, cultures.

His response was deceptively simple. "We strive for sensitivity to others, complimented by a pride for one's own. Respect," he said, "is the key. It must permeate everything we do."

But *how* do those teaching with cultural artifacts and expressions engender sensitivity and respect? The approach taken at the Lyman Museum and Mission House is to communicate a balance of information so visitors perceive no prevailing attitudes among its teaching representatives.

The Lyman family, whose home is toured, were missionaries whose presence profoundly changed the native Hawaiian Islanders. While presenting material evidence of the



Exhibitions featuring the customs and traditions of other cultures may provoke biases that inhibit learning.

Teaching about Cultural Heritage

by Alan Gartenhaus

changes wrought, docents strive for balance, describing how missionaries both obfuscated expressions of native culture and how they preserved them. For example, missionaries were responsible for the destruction of the islanders' native religion. Yet, they transcribed the Hawaiian language (which had been only oral) into written form, protecting it from possible extinction.

Balanced presentation of information, a perceivable lack of judgments, and the perceivable presence of respect are among the prerequisites for teaching others about cultural heritage.

Since actively acquired concepts whose meanings emerge through the learner's *own* discoveries tend to be the most useful and best retained, docents teaching about cultural heritage should strive to involve their learners. One technique that can make other cultures more accessible (and that encourages interaction and discovery) is to present the familiar as strange so that the strange will seem more familiar.

Before bringing learners to an exhibition that may invoke their personal and cultural biases, an introduction is in order. It could begin by asking learners to name some of the many things we do to enhance our appearance. Their answers will range from make-up to hair removal, and from contact lenses to tattoos.

After each answer is offered, restate it in a way that makes it sound less familiar or "acceptable." For instance, if a learner offers the answer, "ear piercing," the docent might say, "yes, we do hang decorative objects from holes poked through parts of our bodies." Or, if someone else says "high heels," the docent could respond, "yes, some of us wear shoes that force

us to stand on the front of our feet, misshaping them and throwing our backs out of alignment in order to make our legs appear more attractive."

Then, when the docent shows learners what people from other cultures do to decorate themselves, she might ask them to draw parallels to what we do to ourselves. Scarification could be equated with tattooing or cosmetic surgery. The use of rings to elongate necks could be viewed as similar to wearing pointy-toed shoes or using metal braces to move teeth into a more pleasing arrangement. Blackened teeth or the use of body paint might be seen as similar to having teeth capped or painting one's finger and toe nails.

The same kind of introduction and activity can be successful when introducing learners to rituals or customs. The docent begins by making the familiar sound strange so that the strange seems less unfamiliar. Rites of passage into adulthood, as an example, might then be paralleled with confirmations and bar mitzvahs or hazing in fraternities and sororities.

It is essential to convey to learners that all people, regardless of culture, are motivated by similar needs and desires, and that it is only the expression of these needs and desires that are distinctly dissimilar. Revealing our common origins, in a balanced, non-judgmental, and respectful manner makes each culture's manifest differences seem less threatening, and makes this form of specialized teaching more successful and effective.



Yvonne Lee, Outreach Instructor at the Lyman Museum and Mission House in Hilo, HI, shows visitors a sewing needle and thimble made from whale bone.

*Alan Gartenhaus is the publishing editor of this newsletter. In addition, he provides workshops for docents and classroom teachers on interpretative teaching techniques, creativity and its enhancement, and questioning strategies. He is the author of the text, *Minds in Motion: Using Museums to Expand Creative Thinking*, which has been placed on the recommended reading list of the National Education Association. The text, which was published by Caddo Gap Press of Sacramento, CA, can be ordered by your local bookstore or museum shop.*

Comparative Functional Osteology for Young Audiences

by Robert B. Pickering

Do you know what the title of this article means? Neither do nine year olds, but they could if scientific jargon didn't get in the way. Much of science can be easily understood. It's the words scholars use and linkages they make that complicate the picture for young children. By using the right

"All science begins with observing and questioning."

words, analogies, and techniques, however, it is possible to teach many important scientific concepts to children as young as seven and eight.

All science begins with observing and questioning. Learning good observational skills and asking big questions, such as "how" and "why," are appropriate to virtually all age groups and essential for children. Direct observation makes the abstract real and gives children some control over the subject. Osteology (the study of skeletons and bones) and Paleontology (the study of extinct life) easily draw the attention of children as young as four and five. By using their inherent interest, and asking questions to fully engage their learning, powerful teaching activities can be constructed.

Education for any age group requires an understanding of the group's possibilities and limitations. If children do not grasp the ideas and concepts you present or the examples you use, they will not learn. Even worse, such misunderstandings can make the whole museum experience a negative one.

I asked one young boy who endured a guided geology tour far beyond his comprehension if he enjoyed the experience. Mournfully, he responded, "She made us look at every single rock!" Regardless of his instructor's good intentions, the message received was not a positive one.

Before the age of eight, children have difficulty separating the concepts of time and space. That simple but powerful reality jeopardizes the educational value of most historical, archaeological, and paleontological exhibits for younger audiences. It also threatens many of the activities used to teach related concepts.

Even the presentation of contemporary osteological specimens can be problematic. Using an isolated skull to symbolize a live animal requires a lower level of abstract thinking. Further abstracting that live animal into concepts of ecological niches, special adaptive characteristics or phylogenetic relationships, however, can totally confuse. Though these levels are important and need to be understood, they may not be the best route available to interest young children in nature and how the natural world works.

Remember the title of this article, *Comparative Functional Osteology for Young Audiences*? The title of the actual class taught for seven and eight year olds was *Fun with Bones*, a more palatable title for both children and their parents. The two-hour class took place at the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago a few years ago. The first hour of the class was spent in a classroom with a selection of bones and teeth from different animals. The second hour took place in the Museum's incredible Osteology Hall. While few museums have as varied a

display of contemporary skeletal specimens from so many vertebrate groups, the teaching technique adapts to a wide range of situations.

During the initial classroom phase, children handled the bones. Discussion was open but directed. The instructor asked the kids to describe what they saw and, as needed, redirected their attention. The example bones had been chosen to represent large and very small species, different body parts from skulls to feet, and a variety of adaptations such as carnivorous predators and herd herbivores.

The method of instruction emphasized question and answer dialogue directed toward observation and comparison. This isn't new. It is inquiry, or the Socratic method, applied to real objects. For example, the instructor asked the group to look at the teeth from a carnivore and a herbivore. Then, the instructor asked the group to compare the forms of the two sets of teeth. They easily recognized the cutting and piercing function of carnivore teeth and contrasted them with the flat grinding surfaces of herbivore dentition.

"Before the age of eight, children have difficulty separating the concepts of time and space."

Following this, the children compared these structures to those of their pets and to different kinds of tools, such as pliers, saws, and knives.

Once the basic dentition models were established, other examples

including primates were presented. The group was able to identify that the dentition of some animals include teeth having both carnivore and herbivore characteristics. In that way, the concept of omnivores was introduced.

A second task used the skull to determine whether an animal was bipedal or quadrupedal. The position of the foramen magnum, the opening in the base of the skull through which the spinal cord connects with the brain, is the primary indicator. If the opening is at the rear of the skull, the skull and spine are in a line parallel to the ground and, therefore, the animal must be quadrupedal. If the foramen magnum is at the base or bottom of the skull, the brain sits on top of the spinal cord, which is perpendicular to the ground, and the animal is bipedal. Throughout the skeleton, similar skeletal structures from different animals were compared and discussion focused on functional differences.

Feet were also included. By looking at the structure of a foot, from toe to ankle, students noticed that some had many separate bones while others had bones that were partially or completely fused. The forms of these bones were then related to an animal's ability to run fast or maneuver from side to side. The horse was the primary example of an animal with a streamlined foot form. The lion exemplified unfused foot elements and adaptations for agility. From these two specimens, other animals with other foot forms were introduced.

After the classroom session, the group adjourned to the Osteology Hall. The excitement and level of interest

lively observation game was the actual name of each animal given.

The primary goal of both the classroom and gallery portions of this class was to help kids understand the nature, rather than just the names, of animals. Why is an elephant an elephant? What is carnivorous about a lion? Why can I scratch the bottom of my foot with my hand but a buffalo can't?

The goals of such specialized museum teaching are simple — to spark the curious mind and to show that learning is achievable and fun. Factual knowledge is passed in the process. If museum educators, regardless of their subject, consider the developmental realities of their audience as closely as they consider their subjects, the needs of their audience, the museum, and the person teaching will be easily met.



Ollie Woodbury, docent at the Denver Museum of Natural History, examines dinosaur bones with youngsters.

zoomed. The knowledge gained in class now was used in a competitive game ... who could determine the most things about an animal from its skeleton. The group ricocheted from one mounted skeleton to another. The instructor asked questions about morphology peculiar to each animal.

The children were shown that virtually all mammals have the same hand structures. Though the forms are different, the pattern is the same. With that knowledge, the children looked at the flippers of seals, the flukes of a whale, and the front paws of a mole. They compared differences and similarities and then made conjectures about how those forms related to the lifestyle of the animals. Only after a

Dr. Robert B. Pickering is Head of the Department of Anthropology at the Denver Museum of Natural History. Before this, he served as Curator/Educator of Anthropology at the Children's Museum of Indianapolis and directed the Adult Education Program at the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago. Pickering received his Ph. D. in Anthropology from Northwestern University. He has conducted archaeological and physical anthropological fieldwork in the American Midwest, Northern Mexico, the island of Yap, and Thailand. In addition to conducting research and fulfilling his curatorial responsibilities, Dr. Pickering lectures widely and writes children's books.

Bringing It All Down to Earth

Teaching and Space Technology

by Darlene Ahalt

Over thirty years ago, President Kennedy challenged the Nation to land a man on the surface of the Moon and to return him safely to Earth. The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) not only accomplished this goal, but also placed America in a preeminent position of space exploration, reaping amazing technical and scientific benefits along the way. The Goddard Space Flight Center, in Greenbelt, Maryland, continues to play a major role in this on-going space adventure.

Just as the Goddard Space Flight Center has important responsibilities in the field of space progress, volunteers have important responsibilities for bringing the achievements of the Center down to Earth. Goddard volunteers face a variety of challenges, beginning with the visitor's preconceived notions of the space program.

Many potential visitors, knowing Goddard is a scientific facility, fear they will not comprehend complex scientific concepts. Cheerful

volunteers and a life size model of Dr. Robert Goddard, the "father of modern rocketry," greet visitors to the Space Flight Center. These reassuring faces help visitors understand at once that this is an accessible and enjoyable learning environment.

Computer games and interactive exhibits — always with a "real" person standing by — help visitors learn complex principles in small doses. One popular interactive exhibit, "Design Your Own Satellite," allows visitors to learn about and select the function, power, communication, and data storage capabilities of spacecraft. Through a user-friendly computer program, in a step-by-step process, visitors choose a launch vehicle, the mission of the satellite, the instruments, and power requirements. Then, visitors take pre-flight tests. Depending on the combination of choices entered into the computer, the spacecraft project may not get off the ground because it ran out of money, is overweight, or has an inadequate power system. On the other hand, it could be launched without a hitch.

Volunteers guide guests through the Visitor Center by engaging them with exhibits such as these, often explaining scientific principles with down-to-Earth common sense. The volunteer has learned to communicate scientific principles effectively by keeping them brief and by using analogies and vocabulary appropriate for the age group of the audience. For example, children discover that the lights on the astronaut's helmet perform the same function as the headlights on automobiles.

The guides also have learned that once someone pushes a button to activate an exhibit, the exhibit activates their interest. Volunteers



Interactive exhibits, and the assistance of a "real person," help NASA visitors learn complex principles in small doses.

encourage visitors to sit in the "gyro chair," which shows the operator how a spinning wheel can turn a spacecraft, or operate the Manned Maneuvering Unit that allows them to try to dock with a spacecraft. After just a few tries in these special chairs, the participants leave with a better understanding of the difficulty of keeping a spacecraft in balance.

People Power

Volunteers at the Goddard Visitor Center offer hands-on demonstrations to capture the interest of the audience. One popular demonstration contains a mock-up of a space suit. For elementary school visitors, the highlight of the demonstration is the teacher-turned-model, as the students assess their teacher's stage presence in a space suit. After the laughter, questions begin. The volunteer uses these questions to explain fundamental aspects of living and working in space. For example, in response to a question about what is worn under space suits, the volunteer would explain that astronauts wear a special form of "underclothing" netted with water-cooling tubes that keep them comfortable in the harsh environment of space.

Special programs at the Visitor Center, such as Star Watches, encourage visitors to look up at the wonders of the night sky. With the help of the volunteers, the novice astronomer can learn to operate a telescope and view the rings of Saturn, the storm of Jupiter, the craters of the Moon, and the distant galaxies.

Another popular event that stimulates interest in science is the model rocket launches. Volunteers help make each session a tutorial in rocketry and science. Rockets launched include scale models of NASA rockets, Saturn rockets, and a variety of military rockets. While many people use commercially prepared rocket kits, some hobbyists design their

own rockets. In the tradition of NASA activities and launches, all phases are monitored for safety.

Please Follow Me

Exhibits and demonstrations at the Visitor Center are one way to reach visitors; the other is guided tours of Goddard facilities. Through these experiences, the visitor begins to understand Goddard's research and development environment.

The tour begins in a facility that builds and tests spacecraft. Visitors see a full scale mock-up of the space shuttle's cargo bay as scientists and engineers work on their projects. The shuttle mock-up is used to ensure that spacecraft launched by the shuttle will indeed fit in the cargo bay.

The volunteer explains that a spacecraft must be built in a dust-free environment and guides the group to one of the largest clean rooms in the world. Many visitors are astonished to see actual spacecraft built before their eyes.

At another stop, visitors see the NASA Communications Facility (NASCOM), a world-wide complex of communications services including data, voice teletype, and television systems.

Many visitors are surprised to learn that the Hubble Space Telescope's Operations Control Center is located at Goddard. Through a special viewing area of the Control Center, visitors can watch engineers control the orbiting observatory and maintain an around-the-clock vigil from an array of consoles. Visitors see the complexity of such control centers with their various computers, consoles and monitors, as well as a cooperative, friendly work atmosphere. These technical areas become friendlier and more understandable through the volunteer's description.



Volunteers use a NASA space suit and flight jacket as interactive tools with school-aged visitors.

Pulling an Experience Together

At Goddard, the volunteer's job is to "humanize" the complex world of space exploration. While high-tech exhibits and interactive displays engage the visitor's interest, Goddard's volunteers make the foreboding seem friendly by providing supervision, teaching with analogies and demonstrations, prompting observation and visitor engagement with exhibits, and offering lots of encouragement.

Darlene Ahalt is a Public Affairs Specialist in the NASA Goddard Space Flight Center, Office of Public Affairs, where she began as a secretary in 1973. She has been the Volunteer Coordinator since starting the Volunteer Program in 1980. She also is the Speakers Bureau and Protocol Tour Coordinator. She has been a member of the Goddard Employee Welfare Executive Council for the past four years and has received numerous awards during her civil service career.

Special Needs Require Specialized Teaching

by Peggy Marshall

"Hey! You guys better watch it! When you pull that stick out, the rug will fall apart!" A small boy, who had just threaded wide silk ribbon through wooden dowels to weave a large mat, was laughing at the Special Tour Docents who wheeled him along the floor of the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center. He was one of a group of multiply handicapped children exploring color and weaving.

For the past ten years, Special

Tour Docents at the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center have invented ways to give art experiences to children who cannot walk, talk, use their hands, see or hear, or who have developmental disabilities. Inspired by such educators of the past as Pestalozzi, Froebel, and Rudolph Steiner, docents proceed from the known to the unknown, mixing visual experience with physical action.

It works like this. After the bus arrives and docents greet the teacher, they immediately begin the personal contact special tours require.

A name tag states that the little girl in the first wheel chair is Susan. "Hello Susan. What a pretty blue jacket you're wearing! Is blue your favorite color?" Susan

turns her head away and shrinks back into the safety of her chair.

Just then a small boy runs by and a docent grabs for his hand. "What's

your favorite color, Jaime?" she asks.

"Red, red, red!" he shrieks, and continues racing toward the staircase.

After corralling him and the rest of the group, the Special Tour Docents lead the class to a quiet gallery. Here, lots of colored fabrics are spread out on a drop cloth in front of a large colorful painting. Colorado Springs Docents collect remnants of every size, texture, and color as props for tours.

Do children with special needs respond to our activities from the start? Seldom. "Susan, what color would you like?" asks the docent. Shy Susan still turns her head away. "Would you like to be Susan Blue today?" No answer. "Let's feel this pretty blue velvet. It's the same color as your eyes." The docent wheels the little girl to a mirror propped against the gallery wall. With blue velvet draped over her head, Susan peeks at herself in the mirror. "See your pretty blue eyes? How about putting a scarf around your shoulders? What other color would you like?" Susan points to a bit of rose colored satin. After it is placed on her shoulders, she looks at herself and smiles. "Let's take your picture!," the docent offers. The Polaroid snap shot will go back with Susan to her school.

Meanwhile, Jaime snatches up a big piece of red flannel and waves it around like a bull fighter. "Come with me," says a vigorous docent. "We'll go to another gallery where you can find this red color in many pictures." Jaime is a hyperactive youngster who needs his energy directed productively. It takes almost a one-to-one ratio of docents to children on tours of this kind. Sometimes the teacher's aide or parents help, but the Special Tour Docents don't count on it.



A young learner examines pottery at the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center.

Now that Susan has grown comfortable, the docent wheels her around the gallery. "Let's find your blue color in a painting." Susan begins to look closely at each painting, searching for the color. The gallery comes to life with children searching for colors.

Eventually, everyone is grouped in front of a big landscape painting. "After you find your blue in this picture, Susan, put the velvet down here on the drop cloth and we'll use it to help make a collage on the floor. Remember the word 'collage.' It means a picture made from all kinds of materials."

Susan hesitates, then drops her blue cloth about where the sky would be. "Good. Now, who has some tree colors?" Jaime rushes up with his red flannel and throws it down. "Thank you, Jaime; this picture has lots of red leaves. Put your red cloth on the floor under Susan's blue sky. Billy, do you see some of your white in this painting?" He nods his head and tosses the cloth from his wheelchair onto the collage. "Point to where you think it should go, Billy. Here? Or, down there? What other colors do you see? Jenny, how about you?" Jenny smiles when she hears her name and spreads her green corduroy where the green trees are. "Now everybody move over here so we can take your picture." Polaroid film costs a dollar a picture, so we try to have as many children in one picture as possible.

To show the children what is meant by color harmony, the Special Tour Docents use a Peter Hurd painting of a young, blue-eyed cowboy wearing a light tan hat and a pink, lavender, and blue plaid shirt. His eyes are the blue of the sky and the artist

repeats the color of his shirt in the hills and valley of the background.

"Look around you," says the docent, "and see if you can find someone with the same color eyes and hair as the boy in this picture. Do Billy's eyes match? What about Edward's hair? Just right. And Penny has a pink dress. Does her dress match the cowboy's cheeks? It does! Now, who has something tan to match the hat? Does anyone have a lavender sweater?" With luck, most of the colors can be found in the class. If not, the colors can be found in the remnant bag.

"Now," says the docent, "you will be the artist. Pablo can wear this green sombrero, and you can figure out what colors in Pablo's face and hair and eyes should be repeated in a new picture. What color are Pablo's eyes?"



Props, such as mirrors, cloth, and cameras, will often provoke a response from reticent or withdrawn visitors.

Pestalozzi (1746-1827) stressed that instruction should proceed from the familiar to the new, incorporate the performance of the concrete arts and the experience of actual emotional responses, and be paced to follow the gradual unfolding of the child's development.

Froebel (1782-1852) was founder of the Kindergarten. His methods were based on the premise that man is essentially dynamic and creative rather than merely receptive. His belief in self activity and play in child education resulted in the introduction of a series of toys or learning apparatus, known as gifts, devised to simulate learning through well directed play accompanied by songs and music.

Rudolph Steiner (1861-1925) built his first Goetheanum in 1913 at Dornach, near Basel, Switzerland. He characterized this as a school of spiritual science. The Waldorf School movement derived from his experiments at the Goetheanum. Other projects that have grown out of Steiner's work include schools for disabled children.

(Excerpted from the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 15th edition.)

Special Needs (Continued)

"Brown," says Jimmy.

"Okay, put some brown on the floor."

"His hair is black and so are his sneakers," comes another voice.

"Look at his shirt. What color is it?"

"Yellow!" shouts the class.

"Jenny, can you find a yellow to match Pablo's shirt?"

Before long, a whole new set of colors are assembled on the floor. Then, the docent might say, "Now everybody decide how you would use these colors in a picture of Pablo. Remember, Peter Hurd used pinks and blues and lavender for his mountains." Hints are usually necessary. "You'll want to use the same colors in the background that Pablo is wearing, the way Peter Hurd did in his painting. What color should the mountains be? What color could the trees be? What color might the house be? Is it a gray rainy day or a bright blue-sky day?"

Special Tour Docents know that a successful tour finds just the right way to trigger the children's interest and creativity. Moving from the known to the unknown, having a plan and patience, being prepared with alternatives, touring with a nearly one-

to-one ratio of docents-to-students, using props, and working in an institution committed to serving the audience combine to make visits by severely disabled children to the art center or museum a successful and rewarding one for all.

Peggy Marshall has served as a docent for the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center since 1950. A founder of both the Retarded Children's Association of Colorado Springs and Cheyenne Village, a residential training center for retarded adults, Ms. Marshall is Co-Chair of the Fine Arts Center's tactile gallery where visitors are permitted to reach art objects and know them through touch.



Because the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center has made an institutional commitment to serving audiences with special needs, this young visitor can enjoy an encounter with art.

Manuscripts

***The Docent Educator* requests your ideas, articles, techniques, and announcements for possible publication. Should you be interested, please consider addressing the themes of our upcoming issues.**

Tough Topics: Talking about Nudity, Evolution, Slavery, and Other Difficult Issues
Spring 1993
submission deadline - Dec 1, 1992

Special Audiences: Teaching Visitors who Require Special Considerations or Programming
Summer 1993
submission deadline - March 1, 1993

Thematic Teaching: Great Themes that Provide Tours with Cohesiveness and Excitement
Autumn 1993
submission deadline - June 1, 1993

Have an article, technique, or activity in mind that does not conform to the themes above? You are still invited to submit it for consideration.

Please enclose a stamped, self-addressed envelope with your submission should you wish, or require, the manuscript and/or photos submitted to be returned.

Feature articles average from 1,000 to 1,500 words in length. All texts are edited for publication.

F.Y.C.

For Your Consideration

The Special Role of Art Museums

Art's highest reward is personal discovery. Like falling in love, the experience is unique to the individual. It cannot be programmed. But it can be encouraged.

My hope for the future of our art museums, is to find the permanent collection returned to center stage. This is not to abandon special exhibitions or even the quest for new acquisitions, but to refocus these activities in relation to the works of art at the heart of the institution — the masterpieces overlooked because they are always there ... We must return

the great art in our public collections to what [Franklin Delano] Roosevelt so aptly called public use.

There are heartening signs of change, of new or improved efforts to invite the essential discovery that works of art can enrich the pleasure or diffuse the pain of being alive. Very little is required: curiosity, imagination, longing, accessibility, and encouragement. New modes of presentation quickly kindle new ways of looking and response. Nor does it take long to realize that the more we explore, the more we discover. The

greatest wonder of great art, always, is that it is at once timeless and timely. If we will but give it time.

Must we justify? Some years ago, a BBC commentator queried Kenneth Clark about the purpose of art. Lord Clark responded, "I can only ask you, what is the purpose of love?"

Marilyn Perry, President Samuel H. Kress Foundation in *The Economics of Art Museums*, edited by Martin Feldstein, published by the University of Chicago Press

It Works for Me ...

Docents share techniques they find successful.

Children often arrive at an historic house museum with little idea of what to expect. Time doesn't mean a great deal to them, therefore the age of the house has little impact. It is not until we discuss the differences between then and now, as they walk from room to room, that age becomes more understandable and interesting.

A technique that helps bring history to life is to have students consider the past using senses other than sight. It makes the historical picture more complete and more fully engages their attention. Together, we consider how things might have sounded, smelled, and felt in earlier times.

What today is city used to be more like country. What sounds might you hear in the country? What sounds would have been heard on the nearby rivers and bayous of our area? Would kitchen sounds have been different than they are today? What smells could they imagine coming from that kitchen? What would it feel like to sleep on a rope bed with a moss filled mattress?

I ask students to pretend it is the nineteenth century, and that they are staying in our old house as guests. What did they do for entertainment? What did they eat for Sunday dinner? How well did they sleep?

Discovering history through all our sense makes the picture more complete, and is a really effective method of getting participation from the group! The sweetest words to my ears are when a child says, "This was really fun ... I hope we can come back again."

Myrna B. Bergeron, docent
Pitot House Museum
Louisiana Landmarks Society

Welcoming a Very Special Audience: Museum Neophytes

by Jackie Littleton



It's hard to imagine, and easy to forget, but for hundreds of those who enter your museum this year, the visit they make to your museum will be their FIRST museum visit.

I vividly remember a little girl I met at the New Orleans Museum of Art many years ago. She was so small, standing in line with the other first graders before the museum's huge bronze doors. Her parochial school had come to see *The Art of the Muppets*. Although she was eager to see Bert and Ernie and her other Muppet friends, she was clearly fearful of those doors. When I finally signalled that her class could enter the museum, she lifted her tiny gloved hand and quickly made the sign of the cross.

Most of your visitors will not be as awestruck as that little girl in New Orleans, but many of them would benefit from an introduction to the museum. Big or small, old or new, world-famous or relatively obscure, every museum needs a special program that makes first-time visitors feel comfortable. Such a program should welcome the visitor, provide the museum jargon needed to make the museum easier to understand, and delineate the rules of the institution before highlighting selected exhibits. The following format, observed by the Clarksville-Montgomery County Museum for first-time school visits,

can easily be adapted by other museums, zoos, and botanical gardens.

• WELCOME

"Good morning (afternoon). My name is _____, and these other docents and I are going to show you around today. Before doing that, though, we're going to do a few things to help us get acquainted.

• DEFINITIONS

"I'd like someone to raise a hand and tell everyone the name of this place. (Listen to what will probably be variations on the correct name. After several versions are offered, restate the museum's complete name.) What do you think the name means? (Listen attentively to all answers. After accepting a few possibilities, define the museum's purpose.) Yes, this museum collects, cares for, and displays objects about the history of Clarksville and Montgomery County.

• RULES

"Do any of you have collections? (Allow as many children as possible to share the details of their collections — rocks, dolls, baseball cards, and so forth.) Here at the museum, we put some of our collections into cases made of 'Plexiglas.' How do you take care of your collections? (As the children respond, pass a small square of Plexiglas around the group.) Why do you think it is important that we not touch the artifacts in the museum? (Listen to responses. Then, show the finger-print smeared Plexiglas when someone mentions keeping things clean.)

"We want you to have a good time today, but we want anyone else who comes into the museum while you're here to have a good time, too. Can you think of some rules we should follow while you are here? (Discuss rules

suggested by the children, adding any that your institution requires that are not mentioned by them. Establish the idea that quiet talking is encouraged!)

• LOGISTICS

"Now, _____ is going to divide you into smaller groups so you can hear and see better, and so we can answer your questions more easily. (One docent divides the group and assigns each group to a specific docent.) Remember to stay with your group, and we'll all come back in here after the tour to talk about what you saw and learned."

At this point, each docent takes the assigned group to a pre-determined starting point in the museum. Exhibits chosen for the tour may be thematic or simply "jewels" of the museum's collections. Any connections to be made between exhibits are your responsibility to point out. Divergent questions, role-playing, and hands-on activities continue the feeling of shared experience the program introduction began. The first-time visitor is no longer "awestruck" but, as my sixth graders put it, the museum becomes "awesome."

Jackie Littleton is the Associate Editor of this newsletter, and a sixth grade classroom teacher at Clarksville Academy. A member of Delta Kappa Gamma and Phi Delta Kappa, she has served as both staff member and volunteer docent at the New Orleans Museum of Art and as an Educator for the Clarksville-Montgomery County Historical Museum. Ms. Littleton is the President of the Children's International Education Center and Vice President in charge of Programs for the American Association of University Women (AAUW) in the State of Tennessee.

Special Topic Teaching

"The Jewish Immigrant Experience"

by Charlotte Paul

How does an ethnic museum, the National Museum of American Jewish History, located in the "olde city" of Philadelphia, tell the story of the immigrant experience to students of all backgrounds and religions using a permanent collection that is not "child-friendly?"

The reality of many special-topic museums, including ours, is that their exhibits are adult-oriented and their space is limited. As Museum Educator, I was sure that a "hands-on" museum hunt was the way for children to understand and identify with the exhibit's artifacts ... but how?

One day the Curator walked into my office with an 110-year old satchel brought to this country by a Jewish immigrant. Would I like to have it for a lesson? A light bulb went off as I mentally placed "hands-on" (non-museum quality) artifacts into what was to become "Grandmother's suitcase." It was to become an important addition to the lessons offered by our Education Department.

The following description of the museum hunt was developed after several experiments to find out what worked best with our tour groups of mainly public and Hebrew school students, as well as increasing numbers of intergenerational visitors.

The experience begins in the sanctuary of Kahol Kadosh Mikvah Israel, a synagogue located in the same building as the museum and home to the second oldest Jewish congregation in the United States. It fits into the Jewish immigrant story very well as the "living history component" of the museum visit. It is in this spot that the idea of "hands-on" artifacts is first introduced. Students see, and in some cases try on, Jewish objects relating to the Bar and Bat Mitzvah (the important life cycle event in the life of a thirteen year old Jewish boy and girl).

Then, the group moves to the audio-visual room of the museum where they watch "Molly's Pilgrim." This award-winning film features Molly, a contemporary immigrant to the United States from what was the Soviet Union. Several objects that Molly's family brought from Russia are seen in the film. "Grandmother's suitcase" also contains examples of these "memory objects from home" so that the docent can introduce the children to artifacts that earlier immigrants brought as tangible reminders of home.

The docent shows students enlarged examples of text that accompanies every museum artifact. She explains how to read the information to learn about the history of an artifact. Aha! The veil of mystery surrounding the museum begins to disappear.

After this, she opens the satchel and carefully removes one object at a time. Each object invokes memories from previous immigrant generations. A description of the object's use and significance follows. Then, the object is given to a student to hold. Each "hands-on artifact" directly relates to an actual artifact in the core exhibit titled *The American Jewish Experience*. The children are then divided into small teams and given a copy of the *Curator/Detective Museum Hunt*, and the game of locating similar authentic artifacts begins. The children must cooperate by reading the museum labels to enable them to match the artifacts.

The culmination of the hunt takes place in the room where it began. Each group shares the results with the others while holding up their object. At the conclusion, they carefully repack the satchel.

The *Museum Hunt* creates a non-threatening game experience that even

Curator/Detective Museum Hunt

1. The name of the artifact is _____
2. The purpose this artifact serves is _____
3. This artifact was made in the year _____
4. The artifact is made of the following material _____.
5. The artifact comes from _____.
6. What did you learn about the artifact by reading the text?
7. Make your own guess as to why the artifact was brought to this country.
8. Is there another artifact in the exhibit you would like to learn about?

our intergenerational groups enjoy. It gives members of the older generation an opportunity to share a childhood memory, using an object from their past, with a youngster. This was especially poignant at a recent intergenerational lesson when Jewish senior citizens paired with Asian high school students from the inner city and discovered similarities in their memories of the immigrant experience.

Another valuable lesson of the *Museum Hunt* is learning to prioritize. Students become sensitive to the decisions immigrants face when selecting small personal items to bring to a new land. Discussions about the kinds of items they might choose, were they immigrants with only limited space, usually focuses on those objects that are irreplaceable, valuable, or that evoke cherished memories.

Charlotte Paul is the Museum Educator at the National Museum of American Jewish History in Philadelphia. She is responsible for the institution's education curriculum, the Ralph Lopatin Film Library, and the training and coordinating of a volunteer staff of 45. Ms. Paul earned her undergraduate degree in art education at Moore College of Art, and her graduate work was done at Tyler School of Art at Temple University, and Glassboro State College.

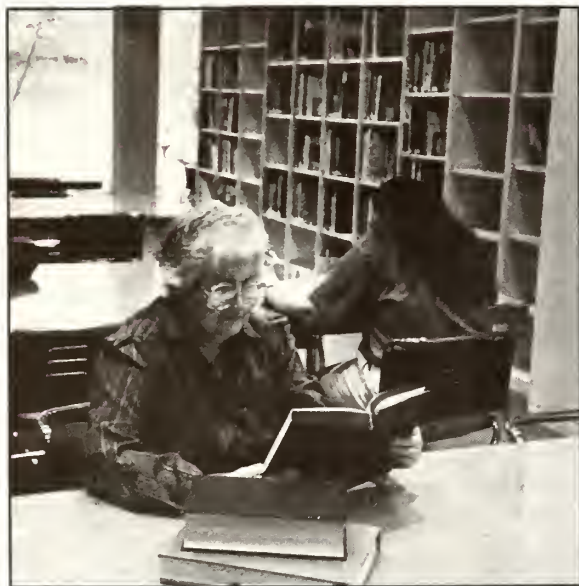
Getting the Most From Your Library Research

by Jeannette Dixon
& William Howze

You are giving a tour and a visitor poses a question you can't answer. The question intrigues you. What do you do? Do you go home and find the topic in the encyclopedia? Dig through old textbooks? Go to the bookstore and buy several new books?

Depending on the kind and amount of information needed, any of these ways can be sufficient. However, a visit to your library could save you effort, not to mention expense! And, the information is likely to be more current than that found on your bookshelf at home.

For purposes of this article, we will discuss examples drawn from the context of an art museum. However, these basic steps for maximizing your use of a library are applicable to libraries in many other types of institutions.



Docents who strive to be good learners, as well as good teachers, know that productive and efficient use of libraries is essential.

How You Begin

1. Gather facts. Go back to the gallery and locate the object in question. What can you uncover right there? Is there a gallery guide or brochure? What can you learn from the wall label? In an art museum, note the name of the artist, the date of the piece, the artist's nationality, the title of the work, and the medium. If a short descriptive paragraph follows this information, try to pick out any key words that will help you pinpoint your search. Now, you are ready to go to the library.

2. Ask your question. You can often save time by consulting the librarian first. Explain your question and how it came up. This will enable the librarian to help plan your search strategy. The more specific you can be about why you need the information and how you plan to use it, the more helpful the librarian can be.

3. Set limits. The librarian will also want to know how much information you want. This will determine the number and types of sources consulted. To find a definition, a date, or some other simple fact, a quick look in a dictionary may suffice. If you want slightly more information, an encyclopedia article is a better choice. However, if you want to compare various interpretations of an artist's work, you may need to peruse a number of books and periodicals.

Getting Specific

Let's say that you go to the library with two questions. The first is the

meaning of the term *gesso*, which appears on the label of a Renaissance panel painting. The other question arises from a desire to know more about the life of the artist Georges Seurat.

Let's analyze the first question and your quest to answer it.

1. You are seeking a definition for a term in a specific context. The term could found be in a regular dictionary, but it would not explain the context.

2. You want to know about the process of Renaissance panel painting, and the materials used.

3. You want more than a one sentence answer.

4. However, you don't want much more than a paragraph explanation or a brief passage.

The sources that fit this description are art encyclopedias and dictionaries of art terms and techniques. The librarian recommends the following reference books:

The Artist's Handbook of Materials and Techniques by Ralph Mayer, a source giving a 12-page article on gesso grounds, with the final two paragraphs devoted to the use of gesso in Renaissance painting;

The Oxford Companion to Art, edited by Harold Osborne, which offers a short paragraph on the term "gesso" with an explanation of its use in the Renaissance and its chemical composition; and

McGraw-Hill Dictionary of Art, a five-volume set edited by Bernard S. and Shirley D. Myers. It has a short paragraph definition and references the book *The Practice of Tempera Painting* by Daniel V. Thompson.

Your second question, concerning the life of Georges Seurat, needs some limiting parameters.

1. You want to compare different perspectives about the artist and his work.

2. You have an hour to read between tours every Tuesday.

3. You want works reproduced in color and detailed biographical information.

If you look under Seurat in the library catalog, you might find a dozen or more titles. Which do you choose? For a comparison of perspectives you can choose two types of sources: a book containing a collection of essays by several authors or separate books by different authors. Since your time is limited, you will probably want to start with a collection of essays. The most recent retrospective exhibition catalog on Seurat would be a good choice because it gives several authors' views, the research is up to date, and it has excellent color reproductions of the artist's work. Its bibliography can lead you to other books you might want to pursue when you have more time.

Let's ask this last question again, but this time using a living artist, Edward Kienholz. You will find only one or two exhibition catalogs listed in the library catalog, so you will need to use other reference sources to locate biographical data and articles in periodicals.

The librarian recommends you start with *Contemporary Artists*, published by St. Martin's Press. In addition to an essay on the artist, this text provides a bibliography of articles by and about him that may be available in the library's periodical collection.

You could also use *Art Index* or *Artbibliographies Modern* to obtain citations from the most recent periodicals published since *Contemporary Artists* went to press. If you want to find more, especially illustrations of Kienholz's work, you should see if the library has special "artists files" or a section of "artists catalogs" that may not be listed in the library catalog. Often exhibition catalogs of fifty pages or less and articles from newspapers and magazines are stored in files.

Tour Your Library

The reference librarian will be familiar with the resources and their locations within the library. After using the library a few times, you will become more efficient with your time because you will know the arrangement of things, and you will be familiar with the basic sources on your topic. While every library is different, some features are standard.

The **reference desk** is the center of activity. It is generally in view from the entrance of the library. There you may be asked to sign in, and it is there that you will find a library staff member to advise you. If the library has closed stacks, you will go there to ask for book retrieval.

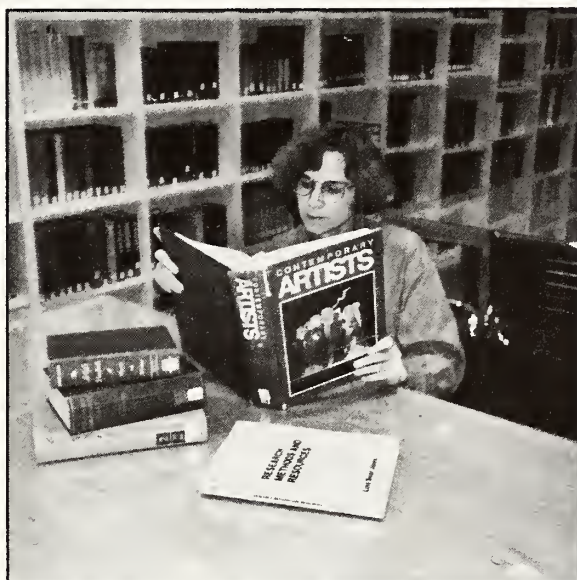
The **library catalog**, either in a card file or a computer terminal, is usually located close to the reference desk. Although the catalog will not list every item in the library, you can expect to find all books included (with the exception of those awaiting processing). Often, periodicals are listed as well. The standard methods of cataloging allow you to find a book by title, author, and several subject terms. If you are using a computerized catalog, you will also be able to search by keyword -- any word in the title or a part of a subject heading.

A collection of **reference books** is located in the reading room. These include encyclopedias, indexes to periodical literature, auction price guides, and other frequently used tools. In many museum libraries, there is often a section of **materials reserved for the use of docents**.

Current periodicals are displayed in the reading room on magazine shelving. Back issues are

often stored in stacks where they are collated and bound.

For more information about conducting art research and a description of a wide variety of art reference books, the authors of this article highly recommend the text: *Art Information: Research Methods and Resources*, by Lois Swan Jones.



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Ms. Dixon is the Librarian at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. Prior to this, she served as Librarian for the Kimbell Art Museum and the New Orleans Museum of Art. She earned a Masters Degree in Library Science from Simmons College, Boston, and is active in both the Art Libraries Society of North America and the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions.

Dr. Howze produces films and videos for art museums. He was an NEH Fellow in Museum Studies at Yale and earned a Ph.D. in American Studies from the University of Texas at Austin. He established the Department of Special Programs for the Amon Carter Museum, where he worked for 12 years.

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